

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 SP-02 INSE-00 CA-01 /054 W
-----022461 050228Z /66

R 050015Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 188
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 1993

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, SN
SUBJ: SINGAPORE TRANSIT CAMP FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

REF: A. STATE 111014, B. KUALA LUMPUR 3603, C. HONG KONG 5184

1. WE NOTE FROM REF A THAT BOTH SIDES AT APRIL 26-27
U.S.-AUSTRALIAN DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON AGREED THAT UNHCR
WOULD BE REQUESTED TO TAKE UP SINGAPORE TRANSIT CAMP OFFER
WITH SINGAPORE AUTHORITIES AND TO EXTEND ASSURANCES THAT
ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE FOR SETTLING REFUGEES. THIS
APPROACH WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY JOINT U.S.-AUSTRALIAN APPROACH
CONFIRMING "IN GENERAL" THEIR WILLINGNESS TO RESETTLE REFUGEES
FROM PROPOSED SINGAPORE CAMP.

2. WE WELCOME THIS PROPOSED INITIATIVE AS BEST WAY TO MOVE
PROJECT OFF DEAD CENTER, WHERE IT HAS REMAINED FOR PAST SEVERAL
MONTHS. SEEMS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO US TO GET UNHCR
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BACK ON CENTER STAGE. FACT THAT, TO OUR BEST KNOWLEDGE,
NO ONE OUTSIDE USG HAS OFFICIALLY APPROACHED GOS ON
THIS ISSUE SINCE LAST DECEMBER'S RATHER PERFUNCTORY UNHCR
LETTER IS ONE OF MAIN REASONS WHY IT HAS NOT MOVED.
(WE ALSO NOTE IN REF C UNHCR REP SAMPATKUMAR'S "PERSONAL
OPINION" THAT PROJECT WILL NOT WORK, LEADING US ONCE
AGAIN TO SUGGEST THAT SOMEONE OTHER THAN HE BE GIVEN TASK

OF MAKING PROPOSED UNHCR APPROACH.)

3. WE HOPE IT IS RECONGNIZED THAT ASSURANCES ON RESETTLEMENT TO BE CONVEYED BY UNHCR AND IN U.S.-AUSTRALIAN FOLLOW-UP WILL HAVE TO BE UNEQUIVOCAL IN NATURE AND SPECIFIC AS TO NUMBERS. PRIME MINISTER LEE AND OTHER GOS LEADERS HAVE MADE THIS POINT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR OVER PAST THREE MONTHS BOTH IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND IN SERIES OF TALKS WITH VISITING U.S. LEADERS. PROMISE OF "EVERY ENDEAVOR" TO MOVE REFUGEES, AS IN DECEMBER UNHCR LETTER, WILL NOT BE SATISFACTORY SUBSTITUTE FOR UNQUALIFIED GUARANTEES TO RESETTLE SPECIFIC NUMBER OF REFUGEES WITHIN 9-12 MONTHS TIME-FRAME ENVISAGED BY PRIME MINISTER LEE.

4. APPROACHES TO GOS ON THIS SUBJECT SHOULD ALSO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT RADICAL CHANGE IN REFUGEE SITUATION SINCE PRIME MINISTER LEE ORIGINALLY MADE TRANSIT CAMP OFFER IN OCTOBER 1977. WHILE CONTINUING TO INSIST ON FIRM THIRD-COUNTRY GUARANTEES BEFORE ALLOWING REFUGEES TO LAND, GOS HAS IN FACT ALREADY BEEN PERMITTING IMPROMPTU TRANSIT CAMP TO OPERATE HERE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. THERE ARE AT PRESENT 304 REFUGEES IN SINGAPORE AWAITING RESETTLEMENT, HOUSED IN YMCA AND OTHER HASTILY ACQUIRED FACILITIES, 241 OF THEM GUARANTEED BY U.S. AND 63 BY NORWAY. THIS NUMBER, IRONICALLY, IS LARGER THAN ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN PROPOSED TO GOS IN CONFIDENTIAL

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JANUARY 1978 AS CEILING FOR INITIAL TEST OPERATION OF TRANSIT CAMP, REFLECTING MASSIVE INCREASE IN REFUGEE FLOW SINCE THAT TIME.

5. WHILE OPENING OF NEW UNHCR-RUN TRANSIT CAMP IN SINGAPORE WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE OF GREAT HELP IN HANDLING REFUGEE FLOW, THE LARGE INCREASE IN REFUGEE NUMBERS WOULD SEEM TO HAVE DIMINISHED ITS RELATIVE IMPORTANCE SOMEWHAT. IF PROPOSED TRANSIT CAMP WERE OPENED WITH ADVANCE GUARANTEES FOR 500 REFUGEES (WHICH WE BELIEVE WOULD BE MINIMUM NUMBER FOR EFFICIENT OPERATIONS) AND IF ENTRY INTO CAMP WERE LIMITED TO REFUGEES PICKED UP BY MERCHANT VESSELS IN SOUTH CHINA SEA, IT WOULD SERVE FOR SOME MONTHS AS HIGHLY USEFUL HAVEN FOR REFUGEES AND WOULD REPLACE THE INCREASINGLY INADEQUATE IMPROMPTU FACILITIES NOW IN USE HERE. UNLESS WAY WERE FOUND TO MOVE REFUGEES OUT AT MUCH FASTER RATE THAN HAS PROVED POSSIBLE UP TO NOW, HOWEVER, CAMP'S LIMIT WOULD LIKELY BE REACHED IN FEW MONTHS AND WE WOULD BE BACK TO SQUARE ONE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 1993

6. WE DO NOT BY ANY MEANS WISH TO SUGGEST THAT
RENEWED EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH TRANSIT CAMP IN SINGAPORE ARE
NOT WORTHWHILE. TO CONTRARY, WE FEEL CAMP WOULD MAKE
VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION, AT LEAST IN SHORT RUN. IT IS BECOMING
INCREASINGLY APPARENT, HOWEVER, THAT MEASURES SUCH AS THIS ARE
INADEQUATE TO COPE WITH THE REFUGEE PROBLEMS IN ITS PRESENT
MAGNITUDE. HEART OF THE PROBLEM AS SEEN FROM HERE IS IN-
ABILITY TO MOVE REFUGEES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIAN
CAMPS AT ANYTHING APPROACHING RATE AT WHICH THEY ARE
ENTERING CAMPS. IF THIS SITUATION LEADS MALAYSIAN AND
THAI GOVERNMENTS TO START CLOSING THEIR DOORS TO
REFUGEES, AS INDICATIONS ARE THAT THEY ARE
BEGINNING TO DO IN SOME AREAS, WE EXPECT THAT SINGAPORE WOULD
FIND IT NECESSARY TO WITHDRAW ITS TRANSIT CAMP OFFER
TO AVOID INUNDATION.

7. THIS LEADS US TO STRONG ENDORSEMENT OF KUALA LUMPUR'S
RECOMMENDATION (PARA 8, REF B) THAT ADDITIONAL MEASURES
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BE SOUGHT URGENTLY TO SPEED UP FLOW OF DEPARTURES. SUCH
IDEAS AS REESTABLISHING A CAMP SOMEWHERE ON U.S. TERRI-

TORY -- MAINLAND, GUAM OR POSSIBLY HAWAII -- FOR REFUGEES
AWAITING VOLAG APPROVAL CERTAINLY SHOULD BE EXPLORED.
ALTERNATELY, WOULD IT BE FEASIBLE FOR UNHCR TO ESTABLISH
CAMP IN AUSTRALIA (DARWIN, BRISBANE) TO HOUSE REFUGEES
AWAITING ONWARD MOVEMENT TO OTHER COUNTRIES,
THEREBY RELIEVING PRESSURE ON MALAYSIAN CAMPS AND
PROVIDING TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATIONS FOR REFUGEES
WHO MAKE MALAYSIA-AUSTRALIA TRIP ON THEIR OWN?
HOLDRIDGE

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